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Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2580, LEBANON: A/S WELCH EXPLAINS NEW U.S. POSITION TO

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BEIRUT2580	2006-08-09 16:40	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2016
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SUBJECT: LEBANON: A/S WELCH EXPLAINS NEW U.S. POSITION TO
SPEAKER BERRI

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C/NF) On August 5, NEA Assistant Secretary Welch, Ambassador, and PolOff met with Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, accompanied by his foreign policy advisor Ali Hamdan, at Berri's office in Ain al-Tinneh, Beirut. A/S Welch reviewed with Berri the possibility that, under a potential UNSCR, an Israeli withdrawal could begin once a sufficiently enhanced UNIFIL and the LAF are effectively deployed to the south. Reviewing his meeting with PM Siniora (septel), A/S Welch informed Berri that, while the PM accepts a larger UNIFIL force under Chapter 6, the UNSC is likely to look at Chapter 7 for the multinational force. Expressing deep concern that the Israeli withdrawal would be delayed until UNIFIL is enhanced, Berri called the new proposal a response to Israeli demands and not a compromise. Berri also expressed concerns that fighting will continue because Hizballah will fire on Israeli troops in Lebanon even after declaration of a ceasefire. Responding to the A/S Welch's warning that a collapse of discussions on a UNSCR would allow the situation on the ground to get much worse, Berri concluded that he must confer with Hizballah before making a decision as to his own views. END SUMMARY

2. (C/NF) A/S Welch expressed to Berri his concern that the situation on the ground is getting more dangerous as time proceeds. Yet there had been some positive developments since his last meeting with the Speaker, especially in light of the 8/7 GOL cabinet decision to deploy the LAF to the south. A/S Welch stressed that the USG now had a commitment from Israel that the IDF would withdraw from Lebanon and that this commitment would be explicitly stated in the Security Council resolution. A/S Welch cautioned that a rapid IDF withdrawal is predicated on when the Lebanese Army and the international force can deploy effectively and in sufficient numbers to the south.

The "New" UNIFIL

3. (C/NF) A/S Welch noted that, at least at the beginning, the international force did not have to be invented from scratch as a MNF. Instead, drawing upon existing cabinet decisions, UNIFIL could be expanded and given new mandate and scope of operations to serve this purpose. The Assistant Secretary informed Berri that Prime Minister Siniora accepts a larger UNIFIL force under Chapter 6. However the Security Council will look at Chapter 7 for the multinational force. He warned that whatever the result, Hizballah could not be present in the area of operation. A/S Welch pressed on this point, saying "this has to be clear."

4. (C/NF) A/S Welch advised Berri that the U.S. is willing to accept the "new" enhanced and improved UNIFIL under Chapter 7 now. He told Berri that the Security Council may act today or it may not act. A Security Council resolution today will mean a cessation of hostilities. However, there will be a time gap before the new UNIFIL can be deployed because of the practicalities of forming and mobilizing the force.

5. (C/NF) A/S Welch reminded Berri that during their last meeting on August 5, Berri said that Israel would not withdraw. "Now I am telling you they will" exclaimed A/S Welch. The withdrawal would not be immediate, but it would be fast.

"Not A Compromise"

6. (C/NF) Berri focused on the fact that a gap would remain between the passage of the resolution and the departure of

the Israelis. He claimed that the new proposal is a response to Israeli demands and not a compromise. Berri asked A/S Welch to recall that during their last meeting he had suggested the idea of deploying the LAF in the South and was able to deliver. Berri expressed his desire to work on resolving the conflict via the U.S. because "America can pressure Israel" and because Americans do not want innocent people killed. He presented A/S Welch with a report that since their last meeting on August 5, 199 Lebanese have been killed and more injured.

¶7. (C/NF) Berri explained to A/S Welch that before the August 7 Lebanese Cabinet meeting, he had received a call from MP Saad Hariri who was engaging the French government. Hariri advised Berri that Israel would withdraw if the Cabinet made the decision to deploy 15,000 soldiers to the south. Wanting to grasp the opportunity of trading LAF deployment for an Israeli withdrawal, Berri accepted the terms without consulting Hizballah.

¶8. (C/NF) Berri accused Israel of moving the goal posts. Deploying the LAF was Israel's only demand and now they want more. He cited the multinational force as an additional Israeli demand and added, "let them put it on their side of the Blue line."

¶9. (C/NF) Berri said that GoL would welcome a greater UNIFIL presence "with their tanks." However, he would not be able to convince Hizballah to accept a multinational force. He warned that if talk continues about a multinational force, "Siniora has to find someone else to talk to Hizballah."

Shebaa Farms

¶10. (C/NF) Responding to the Speaker's questions, A/S Welch confirmed to Berri that the position in the UNSC resolution regarding Shebaa Farms will not change. Berri commented that without an Israeli withdrawal from Shebaa farms he couldn't convince Hizballah to release their arms. As in his August 5 meeting with A/S Welch, he recommended that Shebaa Farms be turned over to the United Nations. He added that putting Shebaa Farms under the control of the UN would not mean that it is being turned over to Lebanon.

¶11. (C/NF) Berri argued that once Shebaa Farms is under the control of the UN, its status will be resolved between Lebanon and Syria in the future. Berri commented that Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Mouallem, during his August 6 visit to Lebanon, told Berri that Syria is not against a UNIFIL and LAF presence in Shebaa Farms. When Israel leaves Shebaa Farms there would be a dialogue with Hizballah to disarm because the purpose of the resistance is "not to kill people, but liberate land." With Shebaa Farms liberated, there will be no reason for the resistance.

New Position

¶12. (C/NF) A/S Welch reiterated to Berri that the U.S. position is that Israeli withdrawal has the potential to begin when international forces and the LAF are deployed to the south, assuming that the forces are deployed effectively and with sufficient numbers and mandate. Berri asked what the new resolution language will include. A/S Welch assured him that the resolution will call for an Israeli withdrawal upon the implementation of a new UNIFIL, rather than a multinational force; and deployment of the Lebanese Army in the south.

¶13. (C/NF) A/S Welch continued that the resolution will be under Chapter 7. He advised Berri that Lebanon will not have to request Chapter 7. The Ambassador added that Chapter 7 is "applied for you and not against you." Finally, there will be an initial ceasefire. When the IDF withdraws this will become a full ceasefire.

¶14. (C/NF) Berri feared that the confrontation on the ground

would continue. He cannot guarantee that Hizballah will not fire on Israeli troops in Lebanon after a declared ceasefire. ""This could spark the entire conflict again"" he warned. A/S Welch told him that he now has to make the choice between what is ""bad and what is worse."" The Ambassador reiterated, ""no resolution will be very dangerous."" Berri concluded that he would have to confer with Hizballah before making a decision.

¶15. (U) A/S Welch did not have the opportunity to clear this message.
FELTMAN